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INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 4231
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 7150
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0053
RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA 0994
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JAN QUITO 0914
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SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR PE
SUBJECT: GARCIA GEARS UP TO TAKE ON POWERFUL, LEFT-WING
TEACHERS UNION

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

¶1. (U) Summary: The GOP is taking on Peru's powerful left-wing teachers union, SUTEP, in an effort to advance much needed education reform. In round one of the confrontation, GOP Minister of Education Jose Chang scheduled a competency test for teachers on December 20. The test was stolen and published on SUTEP's website. Chang re-scheduled the test for January 8. SUTEP has imposed conditions for the exam, among them the idea that the results be kept secret. This conflict will test the GOP's commitment to education reform, its willingness to confront vested interests that oppose needed reforms and its ability to manage social tension. End Summary

¶2. (U) The Garcia Administration is heading toward a show-down with the Unified Syndicate of Educational Workers of Peru (SUTEP) over a state mandated basic skills exam for school teachers. SUTEP is a powerful organization of public school teachers (claiming 300,000 members) with radical leadership rooted in the Maoist wing of the Peruvian Communist Party, Patria Roja (Red Fatherland). SUTEP has consistently opposed education reform under the claim of protecting the livelihoods of its members and regularly incites strikes and demonstrations. The organization officially holds anti-capitalist and anti-U.S. positions.

¶3. (U) Minister of Education Jose Chang was forced to postpone the exam, initially scheduled for December 20, because SUTEP had secured a copy and posted it on its website. Media allegations about whether SUTEP stole the exam itself or was given a copy were flying around fast and furious for nearly a week. Chang rescheduled the exam, with President Garcia's support for January 8, 2006.

¶4. (U) Since 1978, representatives of the Patria Roja have maintained control over SUTEP's leadership. In May 2003, the GOP declared a national state of emergency in response to a SUTEP-led teachers' strike. Despite their effectiveness at getting benefits for the teachers, SUTEP strikes are a double-edged sword, often causing great public discomfort and popular anger. In addition, there is widespread public dissatisfaction with the quality of public education in Peru, which has led many to question the effectiveness of its leadership and the undemocratic nature of its indirect election system that consistently produces a Patria Roja-dominated leadership. (Note: According to a 2004 Ministry of Education Evaluation, less than 13 percent of 6th grade students mastered communication skills and less than 8 percent mastered math skills from the national curriculum.

The study showed no change in achievement from 1998 testing. End Note.) The majority of teachers do not share political allegiance to Patria Roja. Nevertheless, SUTEP negotiates teachers' salaries and benefits and controls a large pension/benefits fund sustained by contributions from teachers' salaries. This gives the radical leadership enormous leverage over the organization.

15. (SBU) Comment: President Garcia and Minister Chang are making a serious push for educational reform with this mandatory teacher testing and drawing a line in the sand with SUTEP. They also appear to be moving carefully, backing SUTEP into the position of refusing teacher testing and possibly threatening a nationwide strike, both of which would likely be unpopular. President Garcia told CODEL Reid that the GOP would stand firm. If successful, this could become a beachhead for a key institutional reform. SUTEP has several cards to play, however. An all out confrontation could test the GOP's political will in this vital area and signal the extent of its commitment to stay the course of reform in the face of obstinacy. End Comment.

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